

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 EB-08 AID-05 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CU-02 SSC-01
CAB-02 COME-00 DOTE-00 CIEP-01 FAA-00 IGA-02 OES-06
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SUBJECT: MALDIVIAN RELATIONS WITH SRI LANKA,INDIA AND LIBYA

REF: COLOMBO A-15 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING DEPARTURE OF BRITISH WITH BREAKDOWN OF MALDIVES'

TRADITIONAL CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC TIES WITH SRI LANKA, INDIA AND
LIBYA MAY HAVE GROWING INFLUENCE ON GOVERNMENT OF MALDIVES (GOM).
DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN MALDIVES AND LIBYA WILL BEAR
PARTICULAR WATCHING. END SUMMARY.

2. IT HAS BEEN APPARENT FOR SOME TIME THAT TRADITIONALLY CLOSE TIES
BETWEEN REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES AND SRI LANKA HAVE BEEN DETERIORATING.
GOM CLOSED ITS EMBASSY IN COLOMBO LAST YEAR, LEAVING MALDIVIAN MISSION

TO UN AS ONLY OVERSEAS DIPLOMATIC POST. IN ADDITION, LAST YEAR SAW
END OF PECULIAR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AIR MALDIVES AND THEN SRI LAN-
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KAN AIR FORCE COMMANDER PADDY MENDIS, WHO PROVIDED A VARIETY OF MANAGE-
MENT SERVICES WHILE ALSO RUNNING SRI LANKAN AIR FORCE, WHEN US FIRM
TRIA-9 ACQUIRED 49 PERCENT OF AIR MALDIVES AND ASSUMED ALL MANAGE-
MENT FUNCTIONS.

3. RECENT VISIT TO MALDIVES BY EMBASSY'S ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL

OFFICER (REFAIR) REVEALED FULL EXTENT OF DECLINE IN MALDIVIAN-SRI LANKA RELATIONS. ONE PURPOSE OF TRIP WAS TO ACCOMPANY CARE DIRECTOR IN DEVELOPING USG GRANT PROPOSAL TO ASSIST GOM MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. GOM TRYING TO UPGRADE MALE SCHOOLS TO PREPARED STUDENTS TO TAKE "A" LEVEL EXAMINATIONS REQUIRED TO ENTER UNIVERSITIES OPERATING UNDER BRITISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM. IN PAST, PROMISING MALDIVIAN STUDENTS WENT TO COLOMBO FOR THEIR SECONDARY EDUCATION BEFORE GOING TO UNIVERSITIES IN UK AND ELSEWHERE. GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA, HOWEVER, HAS REVISED ITS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND "A" LEVELS NO LONGER GIVEN. THUS, FLOW OF MALDIVIAN STUDENTS TO COLOMBO HAS VIRTUALLY STOPPED, AND GOM ANXIOUS TO BRING MALE SCHOOLS UP TO "A" LEVEL.

4. ON ECONOMIC SIDE, EMBOFF FOUND THAT EXPORT OF MALDIVE DRIED FISH TO SRI LANKA, WHICH WAS VIRTUALLY ONLY MALDIVIAN EXPORT, HAS BEEN SHARPLY REDUCED, AND WILL EVENTUALLY BE STOPPED ALTOGETHER BY GSL IMPORT RESTRICTIONS. AT PRESNET, 85 PERCENT OF SIH EXPORTS NOW SOLD TO JAPANESE FACTORY SHIPS OPERATING IN MALDIVIAN WATERS. ALTHOUGH DEPUTY MINISTER OF SHIPPING SAID MALDIVES STILL OBTAINS ALL REFINED PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FROM SRI LANKA, CONVERSATIONS AMBASSADOR HAD ON PREVIOUS TRIP INDICATE GOM LOOK-

ING FOR NEW SOURCES OF SUPPLY. WHILE GSL TRADE STATISTICS THROUGH FIRST HALF OF 1976 (MOST RECENT AVAILABLE) SHOW PETROLEUM EXPORTS TO MALDIVES GROWING STEADILY, RECENT GOM ACQUISITION OF TWO SMALL TANKERS INDICATES GOVERNMENT LOOKING ELSEWHERE.

4. UNTIL RECENTLY, MALDIVES' ONLY WINDOW ON THE WORLD WAS THROUGH COLOMBO; ALL AIR FLIGHTS ORIGINATED THERE, AND COUNTRY'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ONLY TELECOMMUNICATIONS LINK WAS WITH COLOMBO. AIR INDIA, HOWEVER, NOW HAS TWO ROUND-TRIP FLIGHTS PER WEEK FROM BOMBAY-TRIVANDRUM; WHEN THE SATELLITE EARTH STATION GOES INTO OPERATION IN MAY, MOST TELECOMMUNICATIONS WILL GO THROUGH HONGKONG AND OLD RADIO LINK WITH COLOMBO MAY BE DROPPED.

6. WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH FROM GAN IN MARCH 1976 AND DECLINE IN RELATIONS WITH SRI LANKA LEAVES MALDIVES WITHOUT ITS TRADITIONAL PATRONS. WHILE MALDIVES CLEARLY INDEPENDENT COUNTRY WITH NO DESIRE FOR ANY TYPE OF COLONIAL RELATIONSHIP, GOM'S WIDE-RANGING EFFORTS TO OBTAIN BILATERAL AID AND TO PROMOTE FOREIGN INVESTMENT INDICATES STRONG DESIRE FOR OUTSIDE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. FACT THAT INDIA AND LIBYA ARE FIRST COUNTRIES TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS IN MALE, AND STATE BANK OF INDIA PLAYING IMPORTANT ROLE IN MALDIVIAN ECONOMIC LIFE, GIVES THESE TWO COUNTRIES IMPORTANT ADVANTAGES IN INFLUENCING GOM. LIBYANS HAVE ALSO PROVIDED AN UNKNOWN AMOUNT OF DIRECTLY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND RECENTLY GAVE GOM VERY HANDSOME CABIN CRUISER WHICH NOW ANCHORED IN MALE HARBOR.

7. MALDIVES IS CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF CORPORATE STATE, IN WHICH
ASSETS OF NATIONAL AND THOSE OF ITS LEADERS DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH.
GOM POLICIES ALMOST ALWAYS BASED ON HARDHEADED BUSINESS CONSIDERA-
TIONS, WITHIN CONTEXT OF ISLAMIC LAW AND TRADITION. UNDER THESE
CONDITIONS, DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN MALDIVES AND LIBYA
WILL BEAR CLOSE WATCHING.
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